

Medical Ethics

"The Hippocratic Oath"
Hippocrates (460 BC) "The Father of Medicine"

Highlights . . .

I will apply dietetic measures for the benefit of the sick according to my ability and judgment; I will keep them from harm and injustice . . .

I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly I will not give a woman an abortive remedy . . .

Whatever houses I may visit, I will come for the benefit of the sick, remaining free of all intentional injustice, of all mischief and in particular of sexual relations with both female and male persons, be they free or slaves . . .

Highlights . . .

...What I may see or hear in the course of the treatment or even outside of the treatment in regard to the life of men, which on no account one must spread abroad, I will keep to myself holding such things shameful to be spoken about...

...If I fulfill this oath and do not violate it, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and art, being honored with fame among all men for all time to come; if I transgress it and swear falsely, may the opposite of all this be my lot.

Four Values Suggested . . .

1. **Beneficence:** Doctors are supposed to do good. They should try to heal others and to make their patients better off.
2. **Non-Maleficence:** Doctors are not supposed to do harm. They should practice medicine carefully and conscientiously and, when beneficence is impossible, they should still try to minimize harms.
3. **Honor:** Doctors should conduct themselves honorably. They should treat their patients with respect, and should not enter into objectionable relations with them.
4. **Confidentiality:** Doctors should maintain the confidences of their patients and not disclose information unnecessarily.

Patients' Rights

Council of Ethical and Judicial Affairs, American Medical Association

1. The patient has the right to receive information about his condition, including both diagnosis and prognosis. The patient also has a right to discuss various treatments with the doctor, including cost/benefit analysis.
2. The patient has the right to make decisions regarding his own health care. The patient also has the right to refuse any treatment.
3. The patient has the right to courtesy, respect, and timely attention to his needs.
4. The patient has the right to confidentiality.
5. The patient has the right to continuity of health care.
6. The patient has the right to have available adequate health care.

Interesting Philosophical Issues

Some of these proposed rights suggest interesting philosophical issues.

3. The patient has the right to courtesy, respect, and timely attention to his needs.
4. The patient has the right to confidentiality

Let us assume that (3) should be granted on the grounds that all people deserve to be treated with courtesy and respect. (4) also seems to show respect for the patient and, in that sense, can be justified similarly.

What about the rest?

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Interesting Philosophical Issues

5. The patient has the right to continuity of health care.
6. The patient has the right to have available adequate health care.

(5) and (6) are certainly interesting (and related)

Some people in our country have lobbied strongly for universal health care, though currently it does not exist.

As moral philosophers, we could certainly argue that everyone has a right to treatment but, in the real world, someone has to pay for it, and programs have not, as yet, been able to address the pragmatics.

Interesting Philosophical Issues

1. The patient has the right to receive information about his condition, including both diagnosis and prognosis. The patient also has a right to discuss various treatments with the doctor, including cost/benefit analysis.
(1) points to an interesting debate in medical ethics: whether or not doctors may lie to patients.

Interesting Philosophical Issues

2. The patient has the right to make decisions regarding his own health care. The patient also has the right to refuse any treatment.
And (2) also points to a live debate, that of autonomy vs. paternalism.